

Ab Ovo (or, Eve's Daughter)

2017

Eve, bite taken,

travels her center line—

*rosa linda*                      flowering her pallor.

She is not ashamed      of her nakedness.

This she will not pass on

when she's punished

for knowing the holler hidden in her.

We know nothing

of her daughter                      except her name

means beautiful blue

that she knew

two brothers before the flood.

first published in *Modern Languages Studies*

*Wooly-headed concubine—  
a slut as common as pavement—  
I am an instrument of Cupid,*

*a coast of Guinea wench,  
his yellow strumpet.*

*Copper-colored Sally, I am  
an industrious and orderly creature,  
housekeeper. Somewhere between*

*mahogany and greasy yellow,  
I am not the sage of Monticello.*

*His flaxen joy, his sable Helen,  
his soot-foot bride-to-never-be  
Mrs. Sarah Jefferson, only*

*black wench, negro wench,  
wench Sally, never*

Sally Hemings.

Boy of My Body, January 1790

2016

She gave birth to a child...It lived but a short time.

Madison Hemings

Sage smoke : to coax.

Oil rub : to strengthen muscle.

Hot water : for hands.

Hand of my mother :

to hold while I thunder.

Whiskey wet breath :

to dull me from breaking

after water escapes. My body :

a hinge unhinging : a glass

spider-webbing,

until boy of my body

calls for me : hungering.

Twine : to tie off.

Scissors : to sever.

first published in *Early American Literature*

Mirror, Mirror: Mulatta Seeking Inner Negress

2017

after Alison Saar

*She taint white; she taint black—*

Alison Saar dreams in gold leaf and tar:

black women with domesticity stacked on our backs,  
baggage bound to us by our braids.

In cast iron and wool, in mountain and book,  
I am not mulatta seeking inner negress, but negress

seeking validation for who I am:

hued yellow-brown with thick thighs and wide hips,  
twice-educated with a tongue primed for lashings.

Mirror, mirror, as I child I wished I were mixed,  
jealous of Sally's descendants—

a reason for their exclusion, confusion,  
an excuse for being partial to green-eyed glint.

I was illiterate in Philly Ebonics; my cousins fluent.  
Told by them I *talked white*. Told by whites I *acted right*.

They'd say *nigger* like a litmus test  
for their Oreo theories, see if I'd flinch

or become performance they thought fitting  
of my corkscrew curls and full lips.

first published in *Pleiades*